

Ideology notes 1.2

The main topic and core of emphasis in the new cultural theory is ideology.

The concept derives principally from Marxism.

But it is also significantly changed and developed by the influence of anthropological and sociological thought and by the influence of psychology, particularly Freud's psychoanalysis.

As it has actually developed, the concept has been used in so many contexts and in marshalling such different arguments in such different fields of discussion, that it sometimes clearly belongs within recognizably Marxist thought and at other times it is used in clearly non-Marxist or anti-Marxist positions.

My first concern here will be to establish its general sense within Marxist discussion, although I am also involved in a "revision" of the concept, an expansion of the term to take into account fuller knowledge of and later to explain its development in other contexts.

Tentative definition: a system of knowing

it is systematic;

it is socially created and maintained and has features which are regular and which can be described by abstraction.

it involves knowing; perception involving all the senses, cognition, and analysis or formulation directed toward individual understanding and (by implication) social action. Cognition is here understood as involving conscious and unconscious processes.

therefore we could say that ideology is a term for the social construction of consciousness: Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*

As it has developed, there is a very narrow and specific view of ideology which sees it as a very specific set of ideas such as a philosophy or a set of religious doctrines. There is considerable foundation in Marxism for this concept, stemming from M&E's *The German Ideology*, which essentially takes up such a position. This is also the way the term has been used in mainstream Western political/social analysis.

However the term can also be broadened out to be seen as a necessary structural condition of society: ideology as an essential part of how people are able to cohere as social beings. This also stems from Marx: in particular the first chapter of *Capital*, in which Marx discusses commodity fetishism, that is how in capitalist

society people do not understand certain relations as social relations but instead see them as relations between things.

Some basic assumptions on the way to defining ideology

1. Ideology is not simply a philosophy or a set of specific doctrines. though it may be partially represented systematically by a philosophy, religion, or secular doctrine.
2. Ideology is a system of representation evolved by a specific social group² for classical Marxism this most often concerns class, defined in Marx's sense by the relation of a group of people to production (that is economic production; specifically in capitalist society the production of surplus value). in classical Marxism, ideology is often contrasted to "knowledge" (which is "scientific" or "true")
3. Ideology is a social phenomenon based on historical reality and the material processes of life. "based on" does not need to mean directly derived from but it does indicate a relationship which can be understood in general
4. Part of ideology is based on, related to, reality; at the same time ideology misrepresents that reality, often by omission.
5. Ideology is not static but always in-process, in change, and open to simultaneously holding opposites in a dynamic tension. (see discussion of dialectics)
16. Ideology does not present the true relation of people to their conditions of existence, but rather a changed one. the exact term or metaphor used is significant: false/imaginary/inverted/distorted relation. Each term has a different meaning and implies a somewhat different understanding.
7. Ideology operates on both a conscious and unconscious level. It also operates on a bodily and behavior level.

8. Bourgeois ideology is the dominant ideology of the period in which the bourgeoisie is the dominant class

- capitalism is the economic system; imperialism is its global manifestation (modified by stages of capitalism; transnational capitalism as more powerful than individual nation-states)
- industrial production is the typical organization of production
- liberal democracy is the common form of political organization (modified with local changes) of advanced industrial nations (the state mediates class interests).
- urbanization is a condition of production

9. Bourgeois ideology is not a totally disfunctional way of thinking. It is not simply the result of an attempt to manipulate people's understanding or "public opinion" (although such manipulation goes on)

manipulation theory--Herbert Schiller, Dallas Smythe, George Gerbner, Noam Chomsky, Edward Hermann, Robert McChesney

it is an expression of (part of) people's real lived situation--eg "possessive individualism" from the Reformation to the present
but it allows no real understanding of the concept of mediations on history by groups. Who is "guilty" for---tendency is to blame everyone or a single figure, rather than see degrees of involvement, qualification, mediation, etc.

10. Bourgeois ideology is relatively systematic, but it contains (has within it) contradictions. It also contains (holds together) contradictions.

11. Ideology is not so much false (in the sense of being a deliberate lie) but is limited severely by conditions of which the subject is unaware.

12. In its functioning, ideology serves specific interests
bourgeois ideology serves specific class interests but not always in the way (or by whom) it is propagated, but in its long range social function.

key aside:

Marxism is a philosophy of relations. The conditions of any process are part of what that process is. There are not independent and static factors but dynamic and related ones. Marxism assumes movement, process, interconnectedness, change. Marxism tries to study things in change, not in fixity. Essentially this is the concept of dialects. The core statement is in Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks.

Essential rephrasings are

Mao, *On Contradiction* (the most simple)

Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism* (quite sophisticated)

Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (massively complex)

Althusser, *For Marx*

Ollman, *Alienation; Dialectical Investigations*

Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*

two fairly complex re-assessments of the concept

Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*

John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*